

## **Friends (don't) lie by Idrab**

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**Summary:** Billy picks up a kid from the side of the road, one night. Things go downhill from there.

## Friends (don't) lie

Billy was pacing.

Four steps, *turn*. Four steps, *turn*.

He could only take four steps at a time, because the room he was in was small. Small and windowless, lit up with a single lamp hanging from the ceiling. The walls were painted white, and there was a gray metal door in the middle of one of the walls.

The door was locked, and completely smooth on the inside. No handle, no keyhole, nothing. No way of getting out. (Billy would know. He'd been trying everything he could think of to get it open since they were thrown in here, two hours ago.)

The room was also empty; completely bare of any kind of furniture. The only thing in the room, aside from Billy himself, was *her*. The girl.

She was younger than him by a few years, with brown eyes and brown hair, and she sat still and quiet in the corner furthest from the door. Her knees were drawn up to her chest, her arms were around her knees, and her head was bent forward. Her face was half hidden behind her hair.

Billy didn't even know her name. He'd met her earlier tonight, just before things went to shit.

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*He'd been out, driving and smoking and playing his music too loud, because he hadn't wanted to go home. He'd known that the school had called his dad at work after the incident at lunch, and had wanted to postpone the inevitable of going home and facing his dad's wrath and whatever punishment the man would dish out. It was better, then, to drive around, maybe park behind the gym and get a few hours of sleep in the back of the car, and hope that things looked better in the morning.*

*Needless to say, that wasn't what had happened.*

*He'd seen her in the light of the headlights, walking along the side of the road. With her back hunched and not even reacting to the rumble of the Camaro, even though Billy hadn't seen another car on the road for half an hour. He'd frowned to himself, then. It was the middle of the night, and – as he always kept to the back roads for his nightly drives to avoid complaints from people who could get him in trouble with the police and/or at home – the middle of nowhere. What was a kid doing all the way out here, alone?*

*Without really thinking it through, he'd slowed the car down. She'd stopped walking as he pulled up beside her and reached over to roll down the window on the passenger side.*

*"Hey", he'd said. "What are you doing out here?"*

*She'd shrugged her shoulders, and it would have annoyed him if he hadn't spotted the tear tracks on her cheeks when she turned her head to glance at him. He swallowed; remembered, suddenly, a time before the Camaro, when he'd had to spend the night out of the house. Remembered that first night, when he'd been walking for hours; until his legs hurt, until he was stumbling, until he fell.*

*So he'd licked his lips, sighed, and opened the car door. "Come on, kid. Get in."*

*Surprisingly, she'd gotten in without any hesitation. He'd frowned at that; someone should probably teach her that it wasn't a good idea to get into strange people's cars, especially at night.*

*That wasn't Billy's job, though.*

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Billy kept pacing, and when he wasn't pacing, he was leaning against the wall. He refused to sit down, because what if they came back? He didn't want to give them any more advantages.

The girl stayed seated in the corner, occasionally glancing up to give Billy a look he couldn't decipher. At least her nose had stopped bleeding. (She'd tried to wipe it off her face, but she'd missed a spot, and the dark red smudge of the drying blood looked almost black against her skin. Billy shuddered and looked away.)

He knew that he was bleeding, too. He had a cut somewhere in his hairline, and there was probably blood all over his face by now. After he'd given up his efforts to get the door open, he'd pressed his sleeve against the wound until the bleeding slowed, and eventually stopped. He also had a cut on the inside of his lip – he could feel it with his tongue, and still tasted blood in his mouth.

But it was okay. He could take a hit.

He glanced at the girl. The way she was sitting, almost hugging herself ...

"Hey, kid. You doing okay?"

His voice sounded gravelly. Rough. But she looked up without flinching, face earnest and open as she nodded. He watched her closely. She didn't hold herself like someone who was in pain. She looked exhausted, but there were no involuntary twitches, no carefully measured movements.

Satisfied that she wasn't hiding any injuries, he nodded back and tried to make his face relax a fraction. Look comforting, or whatever. (He'd been told in the past that he looked creepy when he smiled, and he didn't want to frighten her, so he didn't even try. The kid didn't seem to mind, though. Just gave him the tiniest smile of her own before looking away again.)

Billy clenched his jaw and shifted positions. It hurt; his chest ached, his shoulder ached, and his hands were itching to press against his ribs. But he didn't.

Because maybe they were watching, somehow. And Billy never showed his weaknesses to his opponents, if he could help it.

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*They'd been driving in silence for a couple of minutes, and Billy was just wondering how he'd break the silence after this long – and if he even should, at all – when the girl spoke up.*

*"There were bad men."*

*Billy's blood had ran cold at the implications, but he'd kept his voice*

*neutral when he echoed her words.*

*"Bad men?"*

*If he'd hoped for her to elaborate, he was disappointed. She only nodded, without looking at him, as if that explained everything. And maybe to her, it did. But it put Billy in a difficult position. He knew that the responsible thing to do was to drive her to the police station, or maybe the hospital – but if he did, he'd inevitably get involved in whatever was going on, and his dad would hear about it. And it wouldn't matter if it had been the right thing to do or not; Billy would end up paying for it, somehow.*

*Shit.*

*"Do you – do you wanna go to the police?" he'd asked, trying to sound neutral and stumbling over his words instead.*

*Her head had snapped up, and she'd stared at him with wide eyes. "No!"*

*Her reaction had sent chills down his spine, but he hadn't known why.*

*"The hospital, then?"*

*She'd shook her head violently.*

*"No", she'd said, and then, more quietly, "Please."*

*Dragging his hand through his hair and wishing for a cigarette, he'd bit his lip and frowned at her.*

*"Where do you want me to take you, then? You got family? Friends?"*

*She'd watched him with her dark eyes, and said nothing. The silence grew and grew and grew until Billy felt like squirming in his seat. In the end, her face had settled into a blank mask, and she'd turned forward and pointed out the windshield. Out into the darkness, and the road ahead. No mention of any loved ones – and Billy knew about those things; knew when not to ask. Apparently, she had no specific destination in mind. Billy would be worried, but the truth was that it suited him just fine.*

*"Just going for a drive, huh?" Yeah, Billy could relate.*

*She'd let out a breath, and it had sounded like relief.*

*Eventually, he'd have to figure out what to do with her, but that was hours away. For now he could drive into the night and let this strange girl tag along, if that was what she wanted. This, he could do. It wasn't a hardship.*

*He'd barely finished the thought before the world exploded. There was a crash and the car lurched to the side, and then everything turned upside down. There was the sound of glass shattering and someone screaming, and he could feel his body be thrown forward. His head hit something hard, and the next thing he knew the car was upside down and still and he was lying in a heap on its ceiling, looking up at the seat above him and blinking stars out of his eyes.*

*There'd been strange sounds to the side of him, and he'd carefully turned his head just in time to see two men wrench the door on the passenger side open and drag the girl out of there, none too gently.*

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"You helped me."

Her voice from the corner cut through his thoughts, and he found that he'd stopped pacing. Now, he was leaning heavily against the wall, keeping an eye on the door and a hand against his ribs. Frowning, he lowered his hand, trying to make the move look natural.

"What?"

"You helped me", she repeated. "Back then."

He barked out a self-deprecating laugh.

"Yeah, right. I didn't do shit, kid."

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*He'd reached out for her without thinking, but at the same time someone had opened the door on the driver's side, too, and strong hands grabbed his arms and pulled him out. His shoulder felt as if it was on fire, and maybe he screamed – either way, he punched the first face he saw when they'd gotten him on his feet. The face disappeared from his line of vision,*

*and was quickly replaced by another. Then, a fist to the face snapped Billy's head to the side, and a punch to the gut made him double over. The hands still wouldn't let him go; held him against the wreck of the Camaro while he gasped for breath and tried to wrap his head around what was going on.*

*There'd been the smell of gasoline in the air. Something was burning. The car was a wreck. As his head lolled to the side he got a better look at it, and— How had they even survived?*

*"Let me go!"*

*The girl's voice.*

*Looking up, he'd seen her on the other side of the upturned car, struggling between two serious-looking men. They were dragging her away from the wreck, back up toward the road where a white van was waiting, engine idling. As he watched, one of the men yanked her harshly by the arm, making her whimper.*

*Her nose was bleeding.*

*Bad men, she'd said. Who the fuck hurts a little girl like that?*

*For a second, her eyes had met Billy's and it was like he'd been punched again. She looked terrified, but resigned, and Billy didn't know her but that? That just wouldn't do.*

*With a growl, Billy had tackled the closest man who was holding him, and managed to get him on the ground. He didn't have time to get any hits in before someone pulled him off, though, and he was wrestled to the ground. He got a knee in the back and cursed, but stilled when he heard a click and felt something cold against the back of his head.*

*Gun, he'd thought. That's a gun.*

*He'd half-expected to be shot right then and there and for them to leave his body on the side of the road, but the girl had screamed "No!", and no bullet had come.*

*A pair of shiny shoes had appeared in front of his face, and he'd craned his neck to see who they belonged to.*

*A gray-haired man with cold blue eyes looked from Billy, to the struggling girl, and then back to Billy again. There was an almost thoughtful expression on his face.*

"Bring him."

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So in the end Billy hadn't been able to do a thing to prevent these people, whoever they were, from taking him and the kid and locking them in here. It burned within him, and it took a moment to recognize the feeling as *shame*.

His dad was right. He was fucking useless.

As if the kid could read his mind or something, she shook her head and looked at him with an expression that he couldn't figure out.

"You tried", she said and gave him a smile. "Thank you."

Her smile didn't reach her eyes – as if she'd already given up, but was trying to be brave for *his* benefit – and he had to bite his bottom lip to stop himself from apologizing to her. It was bizarre; *he didn't even know her*.

"You can sit", she said after a while. "I'll tell you if they come."

It rubbed him the wrong way, how she said it. As if she was trying to baby him or something. But he was tired. He was hurting, and he didn't know what was going on. A few minutes of rest wouldn't hurt. So before he could change his mind, he walked over and slid down the wall next to her, careful to put some distance between them. He let out a pained grunt when the movement made the ache in his chest and side flare up, and he took a couple of seconds to just breathe with his eyes closed before he put himself together and resumed his glaring at the door.

He wasn't sure he'd be able to get up from the floor in time to stop anyone from getting to them, even if they somehow heard them coming, but that probably wouldn't matter. After all, he hadn't been able to stop them last time either.

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*They'd been thrown into the van, both of them, and the men had shut and locked the doors. Billy had heard them talking from outside, and then the sound of shoes on gravel, and car doors slamming shut – and then the van started moving. He'd tried the doors, but they were trapped. He'd slammed his hand on the sides, but to no avail, and eventually he'd had to sit down so he wouldn't lose his balance and get more hurt.*

*The girl had already curled up in the corner of the van, and she was hiding her face in her hands. Billy had thought she was crying, at first, and his mind blanked when he tried to think of something to say. When she lowered her hands and looked at him, he'd been relieved that there were no tears – only distress.*

*Billy had felt a sudden unfamiliar urge to reassure her, and that in itself had freaked him out. He wasn't supposed to be the adult one. He didn't do reassurance.*

*But.*

*"It'll be fine, you know", he'd said, somewhat awkwardly. "We'll be okay."*

*They were in a moving van they couldn't get out of, being abducted by strange men who'd taken them after driving them off the road with no regards for their safety, so Billy's sad attempt at comforting had fallen a little flat. The kid told him this with an unimpressed look.*

*"Friends don't lie", she'd said, seriously.*

*And Billy, who'd been full of terror and anger and hysteria at the time, had snapped. "Well, how the fuck should I know, huh? Do I look like someone who has friends?"*

*She hadn't replied; only looked away and curled up tighter.*

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*"What's your name, by the way?"*

He turned toward her and waited for her to answer. It didn't feel right to keep calling her 'the kid' in his head. He probably should have asked her earlier.

*"Jane", she said, and hesitated, mouth still open.*

He huffed out a breath and said, before she could ask, "I'm Billy." And he didn't know why, but he extended his hand to her, palm up.

She stared at it for a long time – for long enough that he started thinking that she was maybe a bit on the *slow* side – but then she slowly put her own hand in his. He closed his fingers around her hand, gently, and shook it.

"Pleased to meet you, Jane."

Because *manners*, or whatever.

She gave his hand a little squeeze and smiled at him, and it looked like a *real* smile this time.

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*There'd been blood on her hand, from where she'd wiped it off her face, when the van finally stopped. They'd been brought out into some kind of underground garage, unable to see further than the closest concrete wall. Two men had yanked Billy from the van – one of them had twisted his arms up behind his back, making Billy grimace, and the other held a gun to his head and guided him forward by a grip on his upper arm.*

*The kid had been escorted by the same two men who'd held her earlier – but there were four more people, three men and a woman, walking in formation around them. All of them were carrying weapons. It had been a little weird, like – six people for one girl? Seemed a bit excessive. Surely between the two of them, Billy was the biggest threat?*

*No one had pointed a gun at her, though. Small mercies.*

*When they'd been thrown into the room, one of the men who held her had pushed her roughly inside. Billy had earned himself a hit to the back of the head – possibly with the gun – when he tried to get to the guy. He hadn't done it because he cared about her – he didn't know her enough – but she was a girl, and just a kid, and only cowards went after kids. (Billy should know – he'd done it himself.) The guy had deserved more than the glancing blow Billy had managed to hit him with.*

*A voice said, just as he was pushed inside the room with her, "Now, behave, or we'll take it out on your friend."*

*"I don't even know her!" Billy had snarled and whirled around, only to find that the gray-haired man – the one with the shiny shoes – wasn't even looking at Billy. He was looking at the kid.*

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"They came for me", she said, suddenly.

He frowned, and blinked. His eyes had closed without him noticing. He licked his lips and wanted to ask *Who?* but he knew who she meant. Instead, he asked, "Why would they want you?"

"Because I ran away from them."

She wouldn't meet his eyes.

"Why did you run?" he asked.

"They are bad people", she said. "They do bad things. Hurt me. Hurt my friends."

At that, she gave him a look. Glanced at the gash in his hairline, and then looked him in the eyes again, as if she was including *him* in that statement. But that was insane. He only met her a couple of hours ago, and being kidnapped together did not a friendship make.

He wanted to tell her that there was no way the two of them could be *friends*, but something softened in his chest when he met her gaze, and he faltered. In the end, he said nothing, only put his arm around her shoulders and pulled her closer. She put her hand on his shoulder and exhaled.

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It was the early hours of the morning when they came for her. Billy had dozed off, but he was instantly awake when he felt Jane stiffen beside him. Struggling to his feet, and cursing at the way he had to lean a hand on the wall to keep from swaying, he took half a step forward, placing himself between her and the door.

The door opened inwards, and four – no, five – men entered. The room was small. Billy took an instinctive step back, keeping eye contact with the closest man.

The man was holding a baton, and Billy's blood ran cold.

"Move, kid", the man said without taking his eyes off Billy – making it abundantly clear that *Billy* was the kid in question.

Licking his lips, Billy felt Jane grab a hold of his hand behind his back. He straightened up and shook his head, because he couldn't get the words out.

The man shrugged, like it didn't matter – like *Billy* didn't matter – and raised the baton. Billy barely had time to raise a hand for protection before the man smacked it into the side of Billy's head.

Billy fell. It took ages. He heard a cry and didn't know if it came from him or from Jane, and felt her hand being ripped from his. Still he kept falling, falling ...

It was an eternity before he hit the floor, and by then two of the men were already there, holding him down. One held his hands, and the other pushed his head down; his cheek pressed to the floor.

"No, no ... Billy!"

Blinking, Billy forced his eyes to find Jane. She was being dragged from the room, and there were tears in her eyes as she struggled to get away. To get back ... to him?

"It'll be okay", he croaked. "It'll be okay, Jane. I'll get you back. It'll be okay."

He didn't know if she could hear him over the men's voices, but among all the blurry figures in the room, she was the only one in focus. She was crying and looking back at him, desperately. And he could see in her eyes that she didn't believe him.

Desperate now, to reassure her before she was gone, he called out, "Friends don't lie, remember? It'll be okay! *I'll find you!*"

There was an amused huff from the man holding him to the floor, and then –

– and then nothing.